Castlemaine Naturalist

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Of Dogs and Ducks

At van Gemerts' this season a pair of Pacific Black Ducks have raised two families, the first a batch of 16, the second 14. One day the mother was sitting quietly on the bank while the ducklings were in the water. Their dog, who has been brought up with poultry, was not happy with the situation, and went into the water, took one duckling in her mouth, and carefully deposited it next to the mother. She did this with all 14 ducklings, but when she had finished the mother duck called the ducklings all back into the water and took up her position on the bank again! According to Anne the look of bewilderment on the dog's face was well worth seeing!

Verbal report, Anne van Gemert

Babblings from Barkers Creek, N°3

Summer Wildflowers

Each season seems to vary from that experienced in the previous year. This summer has been the driest we have had, and it has been very noticable that we have not had the display of wild flowers seen in prior years, but the weeds press on. I have physically removed five large areas of gorse as part of our land care and land improvement program. (I am not a keen sprayer). However, the number of seedlings that have sprung up despite the dry weather has been a surprise. My recent reading indicates that weed removal is an on-going task for eight to ten years before one can relax.

We have removed thousands of 'coffee' bushes and the rest of our undercover, including wildfowers, have multiplied and spread, giving us the best winter display we have had.

Birds

Hearing recently Marg and Kennet, our residential magpies, calling with an unusual call I looked up to see a Wedge-tailed Eagle soaring above my head. I had not seen one so close to the ground. For over fifteen minutes my 'mates' circled and 'dive-bombed' the eagle until it had soared up and had drifted out of the magpies' territory. However, I was surprised how high the magpies were prepared to fly in order to protect their territory.

In recent days many of the smaller birds have returned, including a Blue Wren and his harem. It would be interesting to know more about the apparant 'recycling' of our feathered visitors, for the smaller birds seem to move through in waves for several weeks, and then fade away for some time.

Kangaroos

We have definitely been adopted by our mob of kangaroos. I am sure that it has nothing to do with the fact that we leave food out for them each night together with buckets of water! At least this is one benifit of a dry summer. One night in the third week in March we were woken by the lights popping on to see a wonderful display of 'boxing' by two young males. We have been surprised how quickly the kangaroos have come to terms with us moving around the house, TV booming, and then later, turning off some lights and putting others on as we get ready for bed. On some nights as we move into the bedroom they bound out of sight. However, as soon as we settle down they soon move back onto the lawn. We have the feeling that they have merely moved out of range of the lights, sitting there until we have finished reading and put our light out, for within minutes they have returned to nibble away until dawn.

John Turnbull

South Gippsland Gleanings

Our trip to the Prom. became a couple of weeks in South Gippsland due to a series of circumstances ranging from a painful foot to a heat wave to rain! However we had a most enjoyable time among the hills of the Strzeleckis and the mudflats of Corner inlet.

One of the highlights of the trip was a few hours at Churchill Island, just off Newhaven on Phillip Island. It's well worth a visit for anyone interested in history or nature, and we could have spent the whole day there easily. Some of the old Moonahs (Melaleuca lanceolata) along the walking track, with their trunks like twisted rope, were very picturesque. Down on the rocky shore were Pied and Sooty Oyster-catchers, spoonbills, cormorants, pelicans, swans, and many Masked Lapwings. There were also lots of White Ibis, Cape Barren Geese and small birds. The White Ibis were moulting and many of the walkers were sporting an ibis feather in our hats.

Another highlight was the Bald Hills Wetland Reserve. The turn-off is about 3 km east of Tarwin Lower, and the reserve about 6 km from the main road. We walked about half an hour to reach the bird hide on the shallow lake, where we stayed for about 20 minutes, watching 9 Royal Spoonbills and 2 Yellow-billed Spoonbills grooming and resting near a small island - and I had left the good camera with the zoom lens back in the car! There were Purple Swamp Hens, a Swamp Harrier, Black Ducks and Chestnut Teal on and near the water, and on the way

back we spotted an Olive Whistler and Rufous Fantails. Later in the day after visiting Walkerville with its rocks and rockpools we returned and did the walk again and added a juvenile Pallid Cuckoo, White-eared Honeyeaters, swans, wrens, Little Pied and Little Black Cormorants, a Straw-necked Ibis and a Pacific Heron to the list, as well as Yellow Robins, Red-browed Firetails, Grey Thrush and Little Ravens. The vegetation is quite a mixture of paper-barks, wattles and eucalypts, and there were Hyacinth orchids, too. The day we were there it was mainly cloudy and drizzly, but I'd love to go back again. I'd certainly recommend it to anyone going down that way.

On our second week we stayed at Toora, and more than once visited the mudflats with their White Mangroves. It was there that we saw the Eastern Curlews and counted 64 on the second day. There was also a number of Pacific Gulls and juveniles, one of which was quite unafraid of us, and we got several quite close shots of it standing in a puddle in the carpark. Another place we visited, only briefly unfortunately, was Port Albert, and there is a 8.5km walking track along behind the mangroves, on a low sea wall, and I saw lots of birds on a short walk along the track, including a small Brown Thornbill which scolded me from about 2 feet away. It was perched in a bushy eucalyptus sappling, and I'd peered in to see what was calling. One flew away, another stayed in the background, but this little one fluffed up and gave me quite a scolding!

Rita Mills

Sandon Birds, Feb. '97

Pacific Black Duck
Little Eagle
Masked Lapwing
Common Bronzewing
Galah
Crimson Rosella
Eastern Rosella
Australian Owlet-nightjar (h)
Kookaburra
White-throated Treecreeper
Wren
Spotted Pardalote
Striated Pardalote
Weebill
Brown,
Buff-rumped,
Yellow-rumped
Yellow and
Striated Thornbills
Red Wattlebird
Fuscous,
White-plumed and
Brown-headed Honeyeaters
Scarlet Robin
Rufous Whistler
Grey Shrike-thrush
Australian Magpie-lark
Grey Fantail
Willie Wagtail
Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike
Australian Magpie
Grey Currawong
Australian Raven
White-winged Chough
Red-browed Finch
Mistletoebird
Welcome Swallow

Susanna Starr

THE SECOND SKILLS WORKSHOP

A highlight of 1995 was the skills workshop conducted by the Victorian Field Naturalists Clubs Association, and held at Anglesea. The second workshop will be held at Lady Northcote Camp at Rowsley, near the northern part of the Brisbane Ranges, from Monday 29 September-Sunday 5 October 1997.

The workshop is being run to provide opportunity for field naturalists to develop their field activity skills through relevant and realistic hands-on activities. The camp is for both beginning and experienced naturalists. There will be specialist leaders to explain and demonstrate skills in various areas, and your knowledge and experience will be extended largely as a result of working with other experienced people on field projects.

Special focus areas are being planned. These are

-ironbark woodland communities and ecology
-roadside and small reserves management
-dealing with land degradation
-reptile studies.

There will be also workshop sessions and demonstrations by specialists in geology, flora, fauna, ecology, and general project techniques. Much of the program will be given to small-group activities in which participants will be able to share expertise and experience.

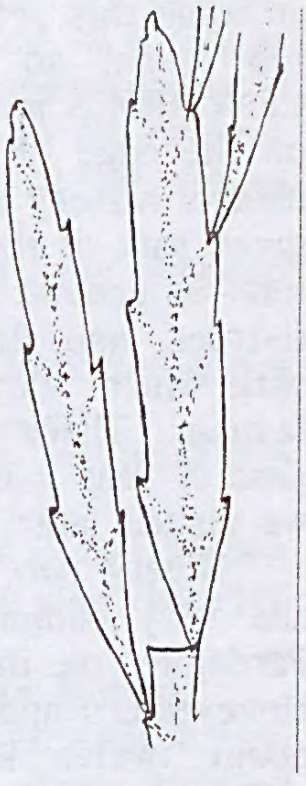
Skills will depend on the type of study chosen, but could include

-how to observe, by knowing what to look for
-more specific skills in critical observation by knowing characters for identification
-comparative studies of different communities
-deciding the purpose/plan/design of a study or project
-suitable (necessary or desirable) equipment, and availability and use
-suitable (necessary and desirable) references and their use
-recording methods, including sketching and photography
-collecting and preserving, including when not to collect
-storage of specimens and materials
-special requirements for a *formal* collecting e.g. for a herbarium
-maps and aerial photographs - how to make and interpret these
-special attention to pest species
-working as a team
-report and article presentation - formal and informal
-oral/visual presentation.

The planning group includes Leon Costermans, Ken Simpson, Malcolm Calder, Pat Murphy, Rod Orr, Noel Schleiger and Dick Southcombe.

Deposit deadline is 30 April. Deposit is $50.Full cost may range from $200-$250 per person depending on numbers. The camp has good facilities. Further information and booking form can be obtained from Ern Perkins. EP

The Leafless Bossiaea from the Alps. *A leafless plant was seen near Mt Tabletop, resembling Acacia glaucoptera and identified as Bossiaea bracteosa. It had what appeared to be small yellow ball flowers at the shoulders.*



Bossiaeas are egg and bacon plants. Two occur locally - *Bossiaea procumbens* and *B. buxifolia.* Both are small-leaved scramblers. The Leafy Bossiaea, *B. foliosa,* is a medium-sized shrub that is common in alpine areas. Despite the difference in size, all are easily recognised as being in the same genus, even when not in flower, because of the similarity in the leaves. Leafless Bossiaea has a quite different appearance, and has flattened, green stems. The wings are notched, and the shoulders usually have tiny leaves. Possibly the small leaves may have given the impression of flower-balls. The egg and bacon flowers are also produced from the shoulders. *Acacia glaucoptera* flowers do not grow from the shoulders but from the centre of the wings, and are at right angles to the wings.

A Showy Street Tree. *What is the name of the two showy trees at the east end of Yandell Street?. They have untoothed leaves and masses of green-pink seeds.*

These are Tree of Heaven, or *Ailanthus altissima* These are declared noxious. The leaves are actually very large, and divided into smaller leaflets which have small lobes near the base. The leaves and flowers have an unpleasant smell when crushed. The trees sucker prolifically, and may put up suckers years after the parent tree is removed.

What is this wattle? *I have been growing acacias from seed collected near Inglewood, to plant on my block at Harcourt (on a granite rise). Have I grown Early Black Wattle, which is an environmental weed?*

Late Black Wattle (*A. mearnsii)* already grows on the Harcourt block. This is indigenous, and is distinguished by closely set, short pinnules (the smallest leaflets), and irregularly spaced glands along the leaf axis. Early Black Wattle has much longer pinnules, and regularly-spaced glands. The sample has moderately long, fairly-well separated pinnules, but irregularly-spaced glands. It is not a black wattle, by Deane's Wattle, *A. deanei.* It is a plant of the granite slopes. It is not native to Harcourt, but should grow well at Harcourt on granite rises.

EP

Easter at Wyperfeld

After last BOCA Easter Camp I'd decided that I would spend Easter at home this year but when Wyperfeld was the venue the temptation was too much, so I made my bookings after all, as did another five CFNC/BOCA members. The camp is not in the Park but on private land on the edge of the park. The owner is a very caring man who loves natural history and takes care of both his farm and the wildlife. He has given part of the property, which has not been farmed, to the Park. He took us around some of it on Saturday, and among the Wallowa Wattles, ti-trees, and Broombush I found tracks of Mitchell's Hopping Mouse with which, along with lots of other wildlife in the area, he was quite familiar. There are three Mallee-fowl nests on the block, too. At this time of year it is unlikely that the birds are working the nest and the one we visited later is idle at the moment.

Ninety two species of birds were recorded until the Monday night, and very common around the camp was the beautiful Yellow-rumped Pardelote (the dry county form of the Spotted Pardalote), Yellow-plumed Honeyeaters and Spiney-cheeked Honeyeaters. Each morning a flock of about twelve Regent Parrots flew calling loudly around the camp, apparantly because they get their water at a trough just outside the Mallees where we were camped. Cockatoos and Little Correllas also flew over each morning and evening. When many of the campers had left on Monday more of the other residents were seen frequently around the camp - Splended Wrens, females and males in eclipse, Chestnut-rumped Thornbills, Silvereyes, White-winged Choughs, a female Red-capped Robin, Purple-gaped Honeyeaters, Mallee Ringnecks, White-browed Babblers, and Southern Whitefaces on the grassland.

Only Maureen in our group got a fleeting glimpse of one of the Quail-thrushes (we think!), but we did see a Peregrine Falcon and Mulga Parrots that day. On another day some of us sighted an Owlet-nightjar and Maureen and Ken saw a number of Red-capped Robins. The Shy Heath-wren was spotted by a small party, but not our large group. However we did see many Purple-gaped Honeyeaters, which satisfied the ambition one one of the party, whose husband had been sitting back at the camp watching some which had come around their campervan during the day! Also on the Desert Walk I was surprised to see several plants in bloom, Common Aotus, Heath Myrtle (Micromyrtus cilliata), Correa reflexa and Desert Banksia (Banksia ornata). There was also a yellow rounded daisy flower which produced the most efficient little burrs I have ever come across.

The escorted drive through the south end of the Park and out to the Lake (dry) Wirrengren Reserve gave a real insight into the variety of habitats in the Park, from sand dunes with old Slender Cyprus-pines and grasses, to flats with Black Box and grey soil, to shrubs and Porcupine Grass between dunes, to Mallees, to dry lakes and creeks with River Red Gums, all providing a different habitat and birdlife.

Rita Mills

Observations

* From Brenda Envall. Her son has seen Crested Shrike-tits, Kangaroos, and Ringtail Possums at and near his place at Riddells Creek, and a friend living at McKenzies Hill told her of seeing a fox in broad daylight taking fowls and ducks, quite unafraid of people nearby. She has been hearing and at last seen a Grey Currawong at her house at Harcourt.
* a Square-tailed Kite has been seen over the Stadium from a house opposite by Tom Garnett.
* Lots of Sitellas were seen near the Red, White and Blue mine, and a pair of Hooded Robins nearby. Maggie Oliver and Kay Turner.
* Maggie has had five Wrens in the garden in Gaulton St. and on a trip to Terrick Terrick she saw two Chestnut Quail-thrushes.
* Margaret Willis reports the return of two Grey Fantails to the garden in Thomas St. They had not been seen for months. She also reported a Mud-wasp nest on the house.
* A Spotted Pardalote was heard in Kennedy St. Barbara Maund.
* Natalie de Macchus told of Hyacinth orchids on her neighbours' property in the bush north-west of Castlemaine. Her Striated Pardalotes, recorded in the February C.N., have returned and are investigating the nesting site again. She also brought a sprig of eucalypt flowers for identification. It proved to be the White Box.
* Grey Box is also in flower at the moment. A flock of Pied Currawongs are around the area in the mornings at North Castlemaine and a Grey Currawong has been seen in the yard recently. Rita Mills
* Stan Bruton brought a huge cone of a Mexican Big Cone Pine for the specimen table.
* Seven or eight Rainbow Bee-eaters, Yellow-tufted Honeyeaters, Southern Yellow Robins and White-throated Treecreepers were seen in Feburary on the remains of the old turn-off to Taradale on the Chewton/Fryerstown Road. Lorraine Rye

Welcome to new members-
Penny Garnett, Colin Blume, Dora Berenyi, and Enid Chapman.

Forthcoming G.D.T. Public Walks
Saturday 10/5 **Working Bee**, duration 3-4 hours, Leader, Ed. Butler, Meet at Daylesford P.O.
Sunday late May, **Hepburn Festa**, 1-2 hours duration, Leaders Pat Conroy and Norma D. Meet Hepburn General Store.
Members and others welcome to join in. Take snacks and water, and lunch on all day walks.

For further details ring -
Ed. Butler on 0353 482367 (BH) or
Pat Conroy on 0353 482825 (AH)

C . F . N . C . PROGRAMME

N.B. Excursions leave promptly at times stated.

FROM THE MARCH MEETING GENERAL MEETINGS WILL BE HELD IN THE UNITING CHURCH (UCA) HALL. Either turn in just behind the Art Gallery in Lyttleton St. and park in the area down from the hall, which is closer to Mostyn St. or turn up the drive behind the Church and park there, or park in Mostyn St. and walk up the steps just behind the Mostyn St. surgery.

* * * * * * Those intending to go on the overnight excursion to Glenburn, Alan Reid's property, on May 10/11, must give their names to the President (George Broadway) by the April meeting. * * * * *

Fri Apr. 11 **Peregrine Falcons**, Vic Hurley, RAOU. Research grant. 8pm UCA hall.

Sat Apr. 12 **Camerons' Crossing.** Leader R. Mills. Leave CHIRP 1.30pm

Fri May 9 **Ants of the Ironbark Forests** , Simon Hinkley, Museum of Victoria. 8pm UCA hall

Sat, Sun May 10 & 11 **Autumn Overnight Excursion to Alan Reid's property, "Glenburn".**

Fri June 13 **Frogs**, Graeme Watson, Melbourne University. 8pm UCA hall.

Sat June 14. **Tang Tang Swamp and Tennyson.** All day excursion. Leader R. Mills. Leave 27 Doveton St at 9.30am. Bring lunch, etc. and binocs.

Fri July 11 Club Members. Subjects and speakers still to be decided. 8pm UCA hall.

Fri Oct 10 **Plants of the Ballarat District**, Pat and Bill Murphy, Ballarat F.N.C. 8pm, UCA hall.

Sat Oct 12 **Mt Beckwith.** All day excursion. Leaders Pat and Bill Murphy Ballarat FNC. Meet at Clunes P.O. at 11am.

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Committee: G. Broadway(Pres.), M. Willis (V.P.), M. Oliver (Sec.), B. Envall (Treas.), C. Morris, K. Turner, R.Mills (P.O. & N/L Ed.), E. Perkins, B. Maund, J. Hewetson, M. Dredge, J. Turnbull.

Meetings:-

General - Second Friday every month (except Jan) at **Uniting Church hall, Mostyn St.**

Business - Held on the 4th Thursday every month (except Dec.) at 38 Campbell Street at 7.30pm. **All Members are invited to attend.**

Subscriptions 1997 - Ordinary Membership: Single $16 Family $24
Pensioner/Student: Single $12 Family $18. Supporting $25
Newsletter posted: Membership + $6

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Castlemaine Field Naturalists' Club Inc.
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